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Requests for observer status in the General Assembly

Letter dated 14 September 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Mauritius to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to request the General Assembly to consider granting observer status to the Indian Ocean Commission in the General Assembly.

An explanatory memorandum in support of the above request (annex I) and a draft resolution (annex II) are herewith enclosed.

I would appreciate it if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 153.

(*Signed*) I. **Dhalladoo**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

Initiated in 1982, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), an intergovernmental organization, was created in January 1984 by the General Agreement on Cooperation of Victoria. It initially brought together Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Since January 1986, the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros Islands and France acting on behalf of its department of Réunion joined in.

The Indian Ocean Commission aims at providing a regional platform for cooperation, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of its population through the promotion of the interests of member States based on their specificities. As regional integration is not confined to purely trade aspects, there is a need to have a broader perspective to mainstream the management of common natural resources. Hence, IOC undertakes actions and carries out programmes and projects that give added value to the natural common resources in the region and improve the management capacity over those resources. IOC promotes the issues of small vulnerable economies and has been designated as one of the three United Nations regional mechanisms for coordination for the small island developing States and participates in and supports the implementation of the conclusions of the International Meeting on small island developing States held in Mauritius in January 2005.

Most of the programmes undertaken by IOC have as ultimate objective the reduction of poverty and the general promotion of the welfare of its people, which are the main objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and of sustainable development. Many of these activities require close collaboration with the United Nations system including on issues relating to small island developing States, on conservation of the environment and biodiversity and on HIV/AIDS.

The Indian Ocean Commission is a small organization and hence does not pretend to acquire capacity in each of the fields in which it intervenes, but strives to facilitate the transfer of resources and know-how in the region in the context of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the objectives of the World Summit for Sustainable Development and the Mauritius Strategy on small island developing States. In so doing, it relies on the competence and capacity of existing institutions such as exist within the United Nations system in order to promote the adoption of concrete decisions which will allow taking into account the particularities and the vulnerability of the island States.

The participation of the Indian Ocean Commission as an observer at the proceedings of the General Assembly would enhance further cooperation between the United Nations and IOC and facilitate the work of IOC as an intergovernmental organization.

The institutional framework of the Indian Ocean Commission

The Indian Ocean Commission regroups a total population of 20.5 million. Four of the member States are ACP States and one is an Outer European Territory. Three of the member States are also small island developing States, of which two are least developed countries. It is the only regional organization of islands States in Africa. Although the member States differ substantially in size and level of

development, they share common environmental features which will shape their future, including:

- Isolation and small size, which increases their need for interdependence and expert help from overseas.
- Variation in their stages of economic and social development, which offers opportunities for collaboration and self-help in responding to economic, social and environmental challenges.
- High population densities, which create pressure on the economies and the environment, evident in the growing and unsustainable volume of new housing and traffic and in structural economic problems, such as unemployment, poorly managed natural and human resources and pockets of poverty and social exclusion.
- Extensive coastal and marine resources which need conserving and developing as a economic resource.
- Rare natural resources which need to be well managed to continue to attract tourists vital to the economic sustainability of the region.
- The risk of natural disasters such as tropical storms, sea-level rise and coastal erosion, which present the need for preventive action to protect infrastructure and people.
- Mountainous topography which demands integrated soil cultivation and watershed management to maintain local food production.
- Rich social, cultural and natural biodiversity, increasingly under threat.

The General Agreement of Victoria (1984) defined in a very broad way the areas of regional cooperation. Since then, the pace of the globalization process, the smallness of the IOC market, the permanent nature of the impediments that are peculiar to the small and vulnerable island economies in their process of development, impediments arising from the combination of natural and geographical characteristics such as smallness, isolation, proneness to natural disasters and the like have provided the basis for the new strategic orientations of the Indian Ocean Commission, which were adopted in its last summit in 2005 in Madagascar.

They define the following areas of cooperation:

- Diplomatic and political cooperation.
- Economic and trade cooperation, including the promotion of issues relating to small island developing States.
- Cooperation in the field of agriculture and in sustainable development of coastal and marine resources.
- Cooperation in the cultural, scientific, technical fields, education and justice.

Decision-making bodies

Each country designates a permanent liaison officer, a senior official for the monitoring of the activities of IOC and to ensure the link between IOC and the national administrations. The Committee of the permanent liaison officers is an executive body, required to prepare then to implement the decisions of the Council of IOC. The Committee of the permanent liaison officers meets about three times a year.

The Council of Ministers is the supreme authority of the Indian Ocean Commission and meets on a yearly basis. Although not anticipated in the founding texts, a Summit of the Heads of State and Government is held every four years, the last one in Madagascar in July 2005.

Secretary-General

The Secretary-General is the head of the General Secretariat and is appointed for a non-renewable four-year mandate. Madame Monique Andreas-Esoavelomandroso has held the post of Secretary-General since July 2004.

Presidency

The presidency rotates from one member State to another, each assuming it for a period of one year. Mauritius took over the presidency during the 21st meeting of the Council, in March 2005 at Antananarivo, Madagascar.

Headquarters

The General Secretariat, situated at Quatre-Bornes, is the permanent structure of IOC responsible for the implementation of the activities of the organization.

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Annual budget

The running cost of the IOC secretariat is wholly funded by the member States. The annual budget for the year 2006 amounts to US$ 400,000.

Funding agencies

The Indian Ocean Commission receives significant grants for the financing of its projects from international partners, and especially from the European Union, the Word Bank, the African Development Bank and France and is supported in its activities by institutions such as the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and entities of the United Nations system (UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNICEF).

The Indian Ocean Commission has developed sufficient capacity for the implementation of its projects/programmes from funding agencies such as the European Union, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The attached annex provides an idea of the portfolio it currently manages.* It should also be noted that the Indian Ocean Commission closely collaborates with neighbouring regional organizations and thus promotes rationalization in regional actions, especially considering that the member States hold membership in multiple regional organizations.

* The annex is available for consultation in the Secretariat.

Annex II

Draft resolution

Observer status for the Indian Ocean Commission in the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Noting the aspiration of the Indian Ocean Commission to enhance its cooperation with the United Nations,

1. *Decides* to invite the Indian Ocean Commission to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to implement the present resolution.